

THE RELATION OF PRESS
CORRESPONDENTS *to the* NAVY
BEFORE AND DUR-
ING WAR

LECTURE

DELIVERED BY

JOHN CALLAN O'LAUGHLIN

AT THE

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE EXTENSION

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN: The tremendous responsibilities imposed by the forward march of events upon the Government and people of the United States command that all the forces of the Nation shall unite for their discharge. Chief of these forces in this modern age is that of public opinion. It is the mainspring of our civilization, the motive power which has driven us resistlessly onward, and which will direct our future progress whether for good or evil. Of all the phenomena of the ages, none is more wonderful than the growth of mutual knowledge, the exchange of ideas, the development of thought, the crystallization into action of the decision which the people have reached in the light of the information furnished them. It is something to marvel at, this possession by each person of a telescope so powerful that within the vision is brought events big or little, transpiring not only in our neighborhood, but throughout the country, and even in the most remote sections of the world. The glass, which enables us to put the universe under our eye at any moment, is the press, and as that glass is held, so we form our conclusion, and so is constructed and applied the Archimedean lever which we call public opinion.

It is a fascinating subject which has been given me to discuss before you to-day. It is as broad as human knowledge, as limitless as human endeavor. It is the cooperation of two great forces, one of which creates, molds, and even directs public opinion; the other, if efficient, which makes its activities possible and executes the will of that public opinion. It is the harnessing of the pen and the sword in the patriotic work of protecting American liberty and carrying on to its sublime destiny the Nation in whose cause both are dedicated.

To men of your intellectual attainments it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon the power of the press—those holy little letters of lead, to use the beautiful expression of M. Anatole France, which should carry right and reason throughout the world. United for good or evil, it is omnipotent. It has conserved freedom. It has made wars; it has averted them. It has planted the seed of reform in corruption,

has given it assiduous care, and has produced social well-being and consequent national strength. It has developed progress and spread civilization. It is the force responsible for the means which give the country safety, and floods those means with a white light, which begets confidence and resultant generosity, or exposes defects which may enable correction from within; and, if that be impossible, correction from without.

There is, of course, another side to the shield. Evilly used, the press is potent for evil. It can make or mar a cause for the moment; but if the cause be good, it will prevail. It can make or mar a reputation. It has made and unmade military and naval heroes. But truth has had, and must always have, its exponents, and ultimately will gain its rightful eminence. It has overawed, coerced, and controlled rulers, politicians, courts; but its victories, when won for evil purposes, have not been, and can not be, of lasting effect.

"I would rather live in a country with newspapers and without a government," observed the wise Thomas Jefferson, "than in a country with a government, but without newspapers." The wisdom of the statesman is in this epigram, for analyzed it means that governments without newspapers speedily degenerate into governments of extravagance and tyranny, while a land without government and with newspapers would, at least, have knowledge, and with knowledge an organized public opinion.

So with the Navy. Deprive the service of publicity, and its development will be arrested and its decay inaugurated. Deprive the service of publicity, and the incentive to efficiency will be lost. Deprive the service of publicity, and tyranny and extravagance will reign. But let publicity, with rightful direction, prevail, and a united people will be behind the service, a united people will provide for its development, and a united Navy, with progressive administration, will furnish efficiency. "Don't wash dirty linen in public" has been the favorite advice of those who believe that the Navy is a private corporation which has something to conceal. But I say to you, throw open the doors to the people and to their agent, the press. It was a maxim of former President Roosevelt that no lie should stand uncorrected; and he was perfectly willing to be criticized editorially if he might say what he would in the news columns. His policy is one the wise will follow. If wrong be charged, investigate it; not in star chamber, but in the open light. During 16 years it has been my privilege to have association with the service. I have seen no harm result to it from sweeping and public inquiry. Who believes the ships are rotten because of the "blowhole" scandal? Who believes the ships are rotten because it was necessary once to lengthen a couple of gunboats? Who believes the ships unfit to fight because experts differ as to the location of the armor belt or the loca-

tion of the guns? Who believes the personnel is inefficient because of the Sampson-Schley inquiry or the occasional court-martial of an officer? Who has not been impressed by the details of the cruise of the battle fleet around the world?

A short time ago I talked with a farmer living in central Illinois. "I've read your articles," he said, "and I like what you say about the Navy. We've got a great Navy. We'll have a greater one. What I can't understand is, why is there objection to a larger Navy in New England? That section ought to understand that it is not the Nation; that we here in the Middle West believe in the Navy, want the Navy, and propose to have it the most efficient in the world." That man voiced the sentiment of the Middle West, and he voiced mine.

Now, how was the interest of this farmer excited, and what does it mean? It was excited by the continual publication of information about the Navy, good, bad, and indifferent. He talked this information over with his neighbors. He became a missionary of the service, and turned with them to his favorite newspaper for instruction and guidance. His Congressman and his Senator became imbued with the notion that as one of the conditions of election and reelection they must stand for a larger and an efficient Navy.

Why do all the political parties insert in their platforms planks in favor of an adequate Navy? Why did the Democrats abandon during the last session their purpose to refrain from increasing the battleship strength? Why is there such a strong sentiment among the Democrats at the present session which will force the authorization of two big ships of the line?

The answer is not hard to seek. It is, as I have said, because of the public interest aroused in the service. Now suppose that all information had been withheld. Would Senators and Congressmen, except those with navy yards in their districts, or who hailed from coast States apprehensive of invasion, approve appropriations for battleships, when the money could be spent, as they would believe, more advantageously on local improvements? Suppose mere official statements were published without that wealth of imaginative detail which sometimes causes the expert to snort with contempt. The technical would have been interested, but the common people, who cast the majority of votes, would not. Look at the deep concern of every Englishman in the size and condition of his country's Navy. How has this been produced? By education—education through the columns of the press. How has the German Navy been created? By the wonderful activity of the German Emperor, by his speeches, which have been quoted in the press, and thus reached every German, and by his Navy League publications. To-day constant reiteration has ground into the German people the belief expressed years ago by

the Kaiser: "Germany's future lies upon the sea." What caused Russia to send an inefficient fleet against the Japanese? Ignorance! The newspapers did not dare to criticize the naval service before the war began; suppression was the least of the punishment meted out. Why did Spain lack a fleet? Absence of an enlightened press, which could have created an intelligent public opinion. But Japan has not an enlightened press, and yet has an efficient fleet. Why? Because of racial traits which are the inheritance of a warlike people; because of an inborn acquaintance with the sea; because a group of ambitious statesmen, who happened to be at the head of affairs, realized the need of sea power and were patriotic enough to develop it, using every available organ, particularly a subservient press, to that end. The vernacular press, by Government direction, continues to manifest a lively interest in the Navy, and is urging its enlargement.

It is evident that you find in me an ardent advocate of publicity. I am—in time of peace. I would conceal nothing from the intelligent observer save those technical inventions in cases of which secrecy is a valuable asset; and then, if I had reason to believe there was danger of publicity, I would not hesitate to tell the facts under seal of confidence. The men with whom the Navy has to deal are patriotic, and where this confidence might be violated once, it would be observed a thousand times. Moreover, the fact must not be lost sight of that what the press wants in connection with any progressive invention is not details which would be of value to a foreign expert. What may be described as "glittering generalities" frequently meet any need of publication; and proper relations with the press once established would assure not merely the suppression of embarrassing information, but the publication of reports upon occasions which might mislead a prospective enemy. If I possessed the authority, I should, in time of peace, enlarge the present admirable policy which the Navy observes. I should ask reputable journals to send reputable men as witnesses of maneuvers. I should invite them to be present at important tests. I should give them access to every bit of information in the possession of the Navy Department, subject only to the restriction that technical and strategic secrets be regarded as sacred. You know better than I how quickly you obtain facts in reference to an advance made by a rival power, and frequently they do not come through the press. With a Navy as large as ours is to-day, it is impossible to prevent leakages through the conversation, either of officers or enlisted men, not only with representatives, sometimes indiscreet, of the press, but with the hired agents of foreign Governments which desire to keep pace with our sea development. *

You will note that I have a comprehensive program of publicity, but it has a limit. That limit applies when war is imminent or is actually in progress. In time of war I would apply a censorship so

strict, so thorough, that the operations of the Navy, including the composition of the fleets assembled, would not even be referred to in the press. I would be Napoleonic in my severity. To quote the great French strategist, I would point out that "balls and opera furnish excellent subjects" for publicity editorially, and, I would add, for the news columns also; but at the same time enough discrimination should be shown to satisfy the public demands for news by permitting the use and discussion of intelligence of no possible value to an enemy. I would not have press boats following the fleets. I would not permit newspaper correspondents to accompany them, but if compelled by political pressure I should limit the number to press associations, and then insist upon absolutely trustworthy men, and require examination of all manuscript by the commander in chief and by the Navy Department as well. It would be my effort to prohibit publication of all events in which the Navy participates except actions, and then in the case of the latter only when publication would do no possible harm and might be productive of good. The Navy suffered from one unfortunate publication during the War with Spain, which has caused a historic controversy, and I would not permit anything of the kind to occur again.

It might be suggested that these are harsh views, and that they are of no value because they are individual. They are not harsh, and they are not individual. I have epitomized in them the opinions of practically all conservative newspaper men with whom I have talked. It was shameful how important information became public during the War with Spain. I had no difficulty whatever in learning the movements of the squadrons under command of Admiral Dewey, Admiral Sampson, and Commodore Schley. I was as patriotic as any other American, but I was young and lacked judgment, and I printed in the New York Herald items that were criminal. I remember on one occasion when Cervera was lost in the Caribbean Sea, but believed to be at Cienfuegos, orders were given to Schley to go south, stopping at Charleston for instructions. The *Minneapolis* was directed to proceed ahead and patrol the Windward Passage. I obtained a copy of the instruction and wired it to New York. The publication next morning was transmitted to London, where it was quoted in the Times, and then relayed to Madrid. Had Spain been provided with a real intelligence service and Cervera with a strong fleet, this information would have been of untold service. When Secretary Long met me on the day of publication, he expressed the utmost indignation, declaring if the *Minneapolis* and its crew of half a thousand men were lost I would be responsible for the catastrophe. My state of mind will be appreciated. I at once sent a denial direct to London, and then, at the instance of the Secretary, cabled an entirely incorrect item in regard to the orders of Schley and Samp-

son and their plan of operations. These two dispatches also reached Madrid.

Nor, in this connection, is my own experience the only guide for your consideration. When Nelson hoisted his flag over the British fleet at Gibraltar, he requested the commandant of that fortress to forbid publication by the Gibraltar Gazette of any information in respect to the strength of his force or the units composing it. During the Peninsular War, Lord Wellington bitterly complained that the English newspapers furnished Napoleon with invaluable information as to his troops and movements. Napoleon, on the other hand, as I have stated, placed an iron hand over the press, going so far in February, 1800, as to issue a decree forbidding publication of anything concerning the movements of his land and naval forces. It is not generally known that the fate of the Battle of Sadowa, during the Austro-Prussian War, was largely decided by a dispatch appearing in the London Times, which informed the Prussians that the Austrians were encamped on the right bank of the River Elbe, information which was confirmed by a reconnoissance. During the Franco-Prussian War, the Prussians read carefully the French newspapers, and it was from this source that they obtained valuable information concerning MacMahon's concentration at Chalons, his march to Rheims, and his advance to the Meuse. In the light of this information, the course of the German Army was so directed that in a few days the surrender of Napoleon was forced at Sedan. In our own Civil War, publication of two of Jefferson Davis's speeches by southern newspapers, which were reproduced in the North and thus reached the eye of Gen. Sherman, influenced the latter in proceeding upon his famous march through Georgia to the sea.

The incident in which I figured, as well as my study of history, taught me a lesson which I have never forgotten. It points a moral for application in future wars. Censors—men of common sense—should not only control the wires at points where armies are mobilized, but in Washington. Outgoing cables also should be strictly watched. If a newspaper publishes any information harmful to the operations in progress it should be punished. There should be no halfway measures. The Nation's safety transcends individual enterprise.

So much for peace and war. What about that borderland between, the "twilight zone," where none can foresee the outcome, and where, naturally, the greatest interest is manifested in the preparations for hostilities? Here liberty of publication can not be interfered with, but it may be controlled. The attempt to stop all publicity should not be made. It would be foolish to try it. But an appeal by the Navy Department to press associations and to newspapers, conservative and yellow, to print no information respecting

mobilizations, movements, and anything which might affect injuriously our operations unquestionably would be respected. You think I have faith. I have. I believe patriotism in the average newspaper office is as earnest, as vigorous, as it is on a battleship. We are all Americans. And I believe, moreover, that such a course would result in a moral boycott of any journal which dared to print an item in violation of an agreement. It might even be possible to induce the press associations to adopt a rule penalizing offenders by the withdrawal of the news service. Besides aiding in this way the press could be used for the collection of information respecting conditions in the country of the expected enemy. It would not be difficult for newspapers properly coached to employ neutrals to obtain and transmit facts. To some slight extent this service was rendered during the Spanish War, but it is capable of development into an efficient intelligence corps that would produce valuable results. When I worked in London I was struck by the solidarity of the English press. In a national emergency the prime minister called the principal editors into conference and explained thoroughly the situation. Thereafter united support was accorded the policy of the Government and frequently information was suppressed. I am satisfied American editors are as patriotic as their confrères on the other side of the Atlantic.

It is hard for the press to learn the responsibilities of its power and to shackle itself with obligations. To-day it is the great medium which transmits the sympathy of one nation for another, the dislike of one nation for another. It is the great medium which carries words of friendship or words of insult. It creates feeling where there is no feeling, and inflames when there is no ground for it. No modern government can withstand its united assault; no branch of that government can resist its constant attack. "Where is the country, rich, prosperous, moral, peaceful," said Edouard de Laboulaye 40 years ago, "which can, without inquietude, look into the future? It is the country where the press, with all its passion, all its errors, publishes the truth and compels everyone to do his duty by force of its opinion. Which are the countries where honest, capable, courageous men are at the head of affairs, where moral superiority is joined to political superiority? They are those where each morning one can say what he pleases, without fear or favor. What state is more powerful than England, richer than Holland, more patriotic than Switzerland, more valiant than America, more industrious than Belgium? And how these terrible journals flourish in those countries; they criticize everything and are not punished. It is life, with all its mistakes, but with all its force and all its energy. On the other hand, look at the unprogressive, poor, corrupted peoples, by turns violent, by turns servile; among them the press is mute, where

one suppresses the newspapers under pretext of preventing the spread of lies and calumny. Who does not realize the alliance between liberty of the press and the fortune of the people is blinded by ignorance or prejudice."

And I say as emphatically as I can that that Navy is and will be best which courts publicity, which has no fear of the light that beats upon it from editorial sanctums. Criticism is a spur to better effort, to better condition. A man for whose judgment you and I have respect said to me that the Navy to-day is suffering from "the besottedness of subordination." Don't be afraid to speak out. Tell the country what is the matter with the service, just as Capt. Sims is doing. Let your motto be, "Expound the truth and the truth shall make us strong." Remember what agitation has done for the Navy. Recall what its condition was a quarter of a century ago—yes, as it was during the War with Spain and since. The country has come to realize the need of a Navy. It has to-day a real appreciation of our responsibilities, a real purpose to provide the means effectively to discharge them. And providing for you as it has been doing, and as it is certain to do when the Panama Canal is completed, it will hold you to a heavy accountability should you fail it when the need comes.

Lecturing before the Army War College some days ago upon the relations of the Army and the press, I gave substantially the same views as I have presented to you. Therein I included several letters which seem to me to express accurately the general opinion of the average newspaper editor and correspondent, and with your permission I shall read them to you.

But before doing so I will read a letter I received to-day from a man who is recognized as the greatest publicist of the age, whose views command instant consideration and respect, and to whom the Navy is so heavily indebted for its upbuilding and efficiency. I refer to Theodore Roosevelt. Mr. Roosevelt says:

THE OUTLOOK OFFICE,
New York, February 16, 1913.

MY DEAR MR. O'LAUGHLIN: I very heartily wish you success in your efforts to put the Navy no less than the Army of the United States in proper relations with the press. I wish that wide circulation could be given to the letter of Mr. Frederick Palmer describing what happened to the war correspondents in Bulgaria. I am well aware that certain newspapers and certain correspondents tend to treat military matters, whether in connection with the Navy or the Army, in a manner which at best is utterly fatuous and at worst is exceedingly mischievous; and in time of war, it is of course necessary that there should be thorough and efficient supervision over correspondents so as to see that no harm comes to the Army (and therefore to the country) with which the correspondents are. But I am convinced that in the natural reaction against all correspondents and newspapers, which has been invited by the conduct of certain news-

papers and correspondents, the pendulum has swung altogether too far the other way. The discredit done to the country and to the newspaper profession and the damage done to the Army and Navy by the wrong type of paper or correspondent is only equaled by the service rendered alike to the country and to the Army or the Navy by the right type of correspondent. What is urgently needed in the interest of both the Army and Navy is not a foolish and ignorant lumping together of all correspondents, good and bad, but a sharp discrimination among them. Every facility should be given to the right kind of man in peace to interpret by actual observation and record the naval policy of the United States. It is of the utmost consequence to our country and to the Navy that our people should have a thorough understanding of what our Navy is in material and personnel, and what it is necessary for it to become, of the problems it would be apt to face in war, and of the inestimable service that it and it alone can render to our country. The right kind of newspaper correspondent can do more to bring about this understanding than any other man of the kind whatever. I would esteem it a piece of capital good fortune for the Navy to have the best newspaper men accompany the fleets on their cruises and observe all the work that is being done. These newspaper men must be carefully chosen, of course; for they should be men quite as incapable as the officers of the Navy themselves of divulging anything that ought not to be divulged or of making use of their opportunities in any way that will not redound to the advantage of the Navy and the Nation. In other words, I would choose the correspondent and treat the correspondent on the theory that he is for the time being a part of Uncle Sam's military force, in a position of high responsibility both to the Navy and the country, and as honorably bound to meet his service and national obligations as is the officer himself. I wish him to be an interpreter and champion of the officers and the enlisted men to their country and to their countrymen. This is a high ideal, but it is one which can readily be attained.

In war, also, I believe the course to follow is to exercise a rigid supervision over the character of the men who are permitted to accompany the Army and then to give these men every proper facility for gathering and distributing all the news that can and ought to be made known. The right type of correspondent is an asset of great value to the Army. To this day the Russian nation, and the Bulgarian and Servian nations as well, are benefiting from the services of such war correspondents as Archibald Forbes, Aloysius MacGahan, and Frank Millet, and I am proud as an American that two of the three names thus mentioned are those of Americans, while the third was married to an American. These men and two or three others like them gave to the whole world the picture of what went on before the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and 1878, and of what the Russian Army did during that war. It was their writings which were in no small part responsible for the fact that civilized opinion among humane people heartily backed the action of Russia in going to war, and respected her for the patient valor and endurance shown by her troops during the war. It would have been little less than a capital misfortune if Forbes, MacGahan, and Millet had been kept at the rear and not permitted to know and to tell both of the triumphs and reverses of Plevna and the Shipka Pass. It would have

been of the utmost advantage to Japan at this moment if in the late war three such correspondents had seen her armies while in action as intimately, and sustained with her generals such relations as those men sustained, for example, with Skobelev. To speak of very small matters, I may mention the fact that there were with me in Cuba certain correspondents to whom I made everything that went on in the regiment plain, being able to trust absolutely to their good sense and fidelity in reporting and interpreting to the American people what was done. Of course, when confidence is thus shown to a correspondent of much the same character that is shown to an officer, then the correspondent must himself be of the type to which we expect the officer also to belong. And if the correspondent acts improperly, I would punish him as summarily as I would punish the officer, and as severely. In other words, give him the opportunity to render a great service, and therefore give him power. And having chosen him carefully as a man likely to exercise this power aright, hold him to a severe responsibility if he exercises it in improper manner.

Very truly, yours,

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

The newspaper men whom I will quote are patriots as well as leaders in their profession. Melville E. Stone, general manager of the Associated Press, is known throughout this and other lands not only for the tremendous work he has accomplished in the development of the Associated Press to the greatest news organization in history, but for the soundness of his views and the saneness of his judgment. Here is his letter:

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS,
New York, January 28, 1913.

JOHN CALLAN O'LAUGHLIN, ESQ.,

Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR CAL.: I have yours of the 28th instant, and beg to say in reply:

(1) Under the disciplinary rules in force in all countries, and which seem to me to be perfectly proper, I can see no way for the Army in time of peace to properly undertake a propaganda of any sort. I am afraid my view is pretty well settled, that the proper course for the enactment of proper laws is through the Secretary of War and his recommendations to the President, and through the President to Congress. These recommendations are naturally made the subject of discussion by the special correspondents at Washington. Any other method of arousing public sentiment that might be undertaken by the Army would, it seems to me, be a fair subject for criticism.

(2) Censorship should begin promptly whenever a war is on. The primal and all-compelling object of army operations in a war is to win victories. It is therefore not only the part of wisdom, but it is an imperative necessity for a Government to impose such a censorship as shall safeguard its work and give assurance that the enemy shall not be advised of action which to be effective must be secret in its character.

(3) No newspaper correspondent has any "right" of any sort either at Army headquarters or with the troops in the field. He is there by sufferance only. Such courtesies only as may enable him to

communicate to his newspaper or press association matter which can not in the nature of things impair the efficiency of the Army to which he is attached, could by any possibility, in reason, be offered. The beginning and the end of censorship should be to prevent the disclosure to the enemy of any information which would be advantageous to it.

(4) There is no punishment, however severe, which could not properly be imposed on a correspondent enjoying the hospitality and courtesy of an Army who was guilty of betraying the confidence of his host.

With all good wishes, I am, as ever,

Sincerely yours,

MELVILLE E. STONE.

The third letter I will read is from Mr. James Keeley, general manager of the Chicago Tribune. Mr. Keeley unquestionably is the peer of newspaper editors, a man of remarkable force, ability, and judgment. He stands for all that is best, not only in journalism, but in the Nation. He has written:

MY DEAR MR. O'LAUGHLIN: I believe that when the life of a nation is at stake, as it generally is in war time, the first duty of a newspaper is to its country. It should not publish anything that by any possibility could give aid to the national foe.

Also I believe that the determination of what would give aid to the enemy should rest absolutely in the hands of those engaged fighting the enemy.

I am a bit chary about laying down any rule for controlling editorial utterances. Nothing should interfere with the right of criticism unless criticism should cloak the giving of information.

On the question of punishment I have no particular thoughts.

Yours, faithfully,

J. KEELEY.

Mr. Keeley has supplemented the above with the following letter:

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE,
Chicago, Ill., February 15, 1913.

MY DEAR MR. O'LAUGHLIN: The control of news during war is just as essential to the success of the Nation as the operation of the Army and Navy. The betrayal of a plan of battle by soldier or sailor is treason, and it is no less treason if done by a newspaper.

This necessary control of news, I believe, could be largely simplified if it was done in conjunction with the newspapers and the news-gathering agencies. This cooperation could be secured by taking steps at once to enlist, so to speak, the newspapers in the service. As the Army is now securing the services of the leading medical men of the country, giving those who act as lecturers and advisers some sort of brevet rank (thus making them an integral part of the service with all that implies), so, I believe, it would be wise to call in representative newspaper men who can help in preparing a course of procedure. These men, or others, should the occasion arise, should have active part in censorship. A newspaper man big enough of course to command respect for his judgment, and fortified with a brevet rank, would make a better censor than an Army or naval officer. This not because he is a better man, per se, but because he knows the business.

Ninety-nine per cent of the newspaper men at the front would respect patriotic obligations. To guard against the black sheep I would swear in the telegraph and cable managers at nearby points. It would then be their military duty to refuse to send any messages not bearing the censor's seal. Every correspondent should be required to file a duplicate copy of his messages with the censor.

The news-gathering associations and newspapers with special correspondents should also be required to file daily with some Government agent a carbon copy of all messages received, accompanied, in the case of newspapers, by the story as printed.

This looks like a big job, but it isn't if it is so worked out before the time of necessity comes.

Briefly, I believe in newspaper men attached in some way to the service as censors; deputed men in telegraph and cable offices; rigid enforcement of conditions.

If any newspaper refused to obey the rules and regulations (and assent should be required in advance) that newspaper should be denied representation, not only at the front, but in every department in Washington and every subordinate place of information throughout the country. If such recalcitrant paper should by publication of any piece of news afford aid to the enemy, it should suffer further discipline. For instance, the postal privilege could be withdrawn.

In all I have written I refer only to the publication of news. The right of comment and criticism should not come within the scope of war-time rules and regulations.

Faithfully, yours,

JAMES KEELEY.

JOHN CALLAN O'LAUGHLIN, Esq.,
Washington, D. C.

I have one other letter I desire to read. It is from a man for whom not only our Army but foreign armies have respect. It is from a man who has served as correspondent in every war which has taken place during the last 20 years, a man who witnessed the Turko-Grecian conflict, who was with Dewey and Otis and others in the Philippines, who was in China during the Boxer revolt, in Korea and Manchuria with the Japanese, and was attached to the Balkan allies during the present war. I refer to Frederick Palmer. This is what he says:

NEW YORK, *January 28, 1913.*

DEAR MR. O'LAUGHLIN: The subject is a complex one. It is difficult to give you my ideas of it in a few words. The Army and the press start from absolutely opposite points of view. The Army wants nothing told about its work in time of war. The public hungers for news, and the press wants to give it the news. My observation of the press censorship both in Bulgaria and Japan convinces me that in neither instance did it efficiently serve its purpose. Owing to the fact of race difference, it was easy for the Japanese to exclude Russian spies. The Turks could have made free use of spies dressed as Bulgarian peasants had their intelligence department been awake. It was not. Such measure of secrecy in either war as the Japanese or Bulgarians maintained was not due altogether to the press censorship, but partly to extraneous conditions. You can not have real military secrecy as long as correspondents or outsiders of any kind

who are inclined to part with their information may talk with line officers and wounded men in the rear and then are allowed to leave the country. Both the Japanese and Bulgarians gave correspondents their passports for departure on request. When I left the Japanese Army in August, 1905, a month before the peace conference, I knew from observation and from talks with the many officers I met at the front that Japan had no intention of attempting the offensive and was determined to make peace. I could have wired this in a sensational dispatch—the sensation of truth—if I had been inclined. For the reason that I believe it is the duty of a correspondent while the war still lasts to observe certain ethics, I did not send this dispatch—though personally my affection for the Japanese was not overpowering. A German correspondent who left Adrianople the fourth week of the present war—a man of experience and a good deal of military knowledge—sent a dispatch after he was across the Bulgarian border, giving in pretty accurate detail the general disposition of the investing forces and the number of brigades, etc., as well as the fact of the presence of 50,000 Servian troops, when not one of these facts was permitted to go through the censorship. The Bulgarian censorship having received correspondents, made them enemies, and then said you may go out and tell the world everything you know and which we will not permit you to send. In short, the correspondents were treated as enemies in camp, while every rascalion who applied at the start was as freely received as he was free to go. The present impression abroad is that the Bulgarian has shot his bolt. This is largely due to the impressions given by the policy of the censorship. On the contrary, the truth is that the Bulgarian Army is in excellent shape. If a dozen correspondents were present and they were writing enthusiastically, public opinion in Europe and Turkey might be different.

If I were a general about to enter on a great campaign with a fully prepared conscript army of the European pattern, depending upon a quick succession of blows with the full military force of the nation, I should take no correspondents. Not only that, but I would not allow them to talk with either officers or privates absent from the front for wounds or other reasons. I would allow no correspondents to enter the staff offices in the capital. I would seal up every source of a possible leak of information, knowing that what my country asked of me in the hour of its terrible necessity was victory. That is the natural soldier logic—for the press supplies no gunfire; it digs no trenches. But if I were general of an army unprepared, which must prepare after war had begun, its enthusiasm dependent on public opinion from day to day, in a country where the press is a great power, then I should take this condition into consideration. If I were going to take correspondents, I should try to make them serve the army, both by tact and regulations. If I took correspondents, I should never let one leave the front without staff permission. I should rather have them actually at the front, severely watched, than about the rear.

Pardon the first person, but I have seen so much of the relations of the army and the press that I am rather accustomed to the point of view of both sides. It seems to me that the control of the press is the one feature which no army that has yet been to war has thoroughly organized. In each instance the organization must be adapted to the army and the press of the country concerned, no less than tactics are

adapted to the nature of your enemy and the terrain over which you are fighting. Of course the patriotic duty of any correspondent is to serve his country. In the right men the patriotic spirit can be successfully appealed to. The right men can be made a unit which will help to care for the bad men—if there is a system of selection.

Now, I am convinced from the result of my experience and observation that there is a system of selection possible by which the demands of the press from the men who telegraph to the men who only write or draw can be satisfied, and under skillful direction the correspondent can be made a friend rather than an enemy.

Finally, I think that if our Army goes to war without correspondents and there is a delay in meeting the demands of public for immediate victory, that the very mystery surrounding the Army will be misinterpreted and lead to damaging changes in plans or in personnel in command by a too responsive Government. A two-edged sword the correspondent—use him against the enemy. I have been a correspondent myself, and I believe that I should still be welcome in any mess in which I have ever lived. So would hundreds of others. They have only to understand the Army, its purpose and its spirit and to be rightly handled under a proper system of regulations.

All this very hastily.

Faithfully, yours,

FREDERICK PALMER.

One word more and I am done. The Mexican situation furnishes an admirable opportunity to arrange a settlement of the relations of the military and naval services and the press.

To the General Staff of the Army, I proposed a conference of its members and the editors of every big newspaper throughout the land for the purpose of thrashing out all questions dealing with the relations of the services and the newspapers in time of impending war and after the declaration of hostilities. As indicative of the character of men who should be invited to take part in this conference, besides Mr. Stone, Mr. Keeley, and Mr. Palmer, I indicated William C. Reick, of the New York Sun; William R. Hearst, of the Hearst papers; Oswald G. Villard, of the New York Evening Post; Frank I. Cobb, of the New York World; Harry S. Brown, of the New York Herald; E. A. Van Valkenburg, of the Philadelphia North American; Gen. Felix Agnus, of the Baltimore American; Theodore Noyes, of the Washington Evening Star; Delavan Smith, of the Indianapolis News; Col. Henry Watterson, of the Louisville Courier-Journal; Col. William R. Nelson, of the Kansas City Star; and Scott C. Bone, of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Such a conference would place behind the Army men of rare intelligence, superb judgment, and unexampled power. It would give that coordination which is essential for preparation in time of peace and assure harmony in time of war. Through this cooperation the country would be a unit in defending its honor, in upholding its dignity and rightful purposes, and in sounding, with clarion tone, its message of American liberty and American democracy to the world.